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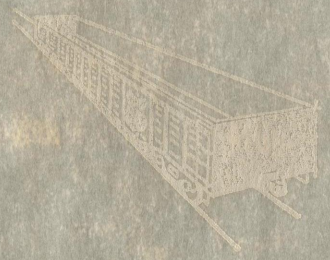
the union pacific story



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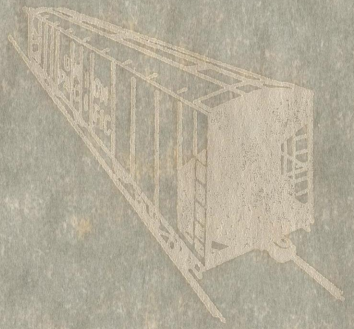

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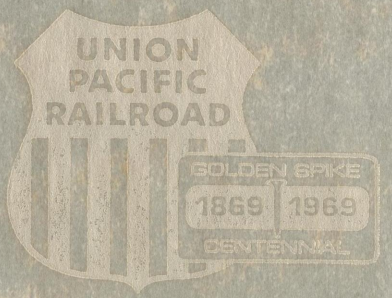
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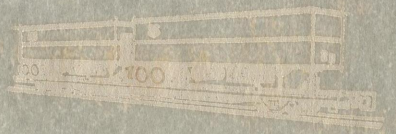
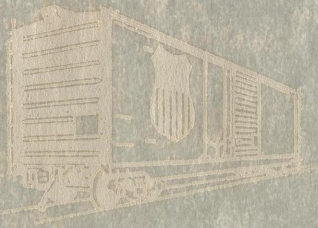



Promontory Summit, Utah Territory, May 10, 1869, a windswept and desolate place where

A golden spike introduced a golden era.

1869

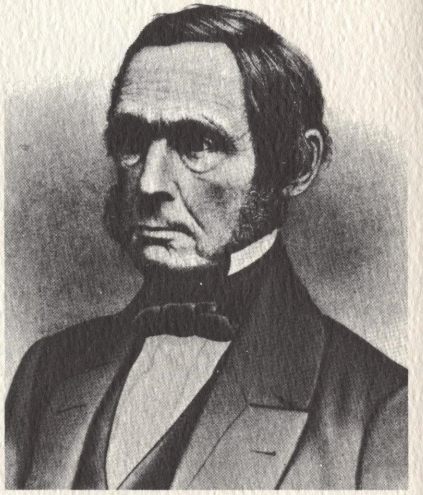
1969

Fifteen thousand horsepower of modern diesel locomotives thunder down the same canyons that first saw the picturesque woodburner of 100 years ago. Yet the first hundred years of Union Pacific's West have seen more than a change in motive power. They have seen half a continent spanned and developed —much of it the result of America's first transcontinental railroad. This is the story of those first hundred years.

3058
3058
U.P.
UNION
PACIFIC
UNION PACIFIC
DEPENDABLE
TRANSPORTATION
3058

"Uninhabitable by a people depending on agriculture for their subsistence."

Sketched by the expedition's artist, Long's men cross the treeless plains.



Major Stephen H. Long, First Officer, United States Army Topographical Engineers.

In 1819 Major Stephen H. Long of the Army Engineers was sent to uncover the promise of the land lying between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains. A part of the Louisiana Purchase, this unsettled and largely unexplored region offered an unknown promise of expansion to the youthful United States.

Long returned in 1820 and put an end—at least temporarily—to this promise. His report left no room for doubt, as the words quoted above show. Soon other explorers echoed his criticism. Accustomed to the forested East, they found the treeless plains arid beyond compare.

Long's "Great American Desert" was accepted as gospel for many years. Maps carried the legend. It was not until Oregon's promise of fertile farmlands and forests and California's gold lured adventurers west that the legend finally disappeared.

Published in 1823

Long's report carried this map clearly labeling his mythical "Great American Desert."

Library of Congress

The trip west was full of hardship before the railroad came despite this idylic scene.

Courtesy of The Butler Institute of American Art.

A national need—
a sectional conflict

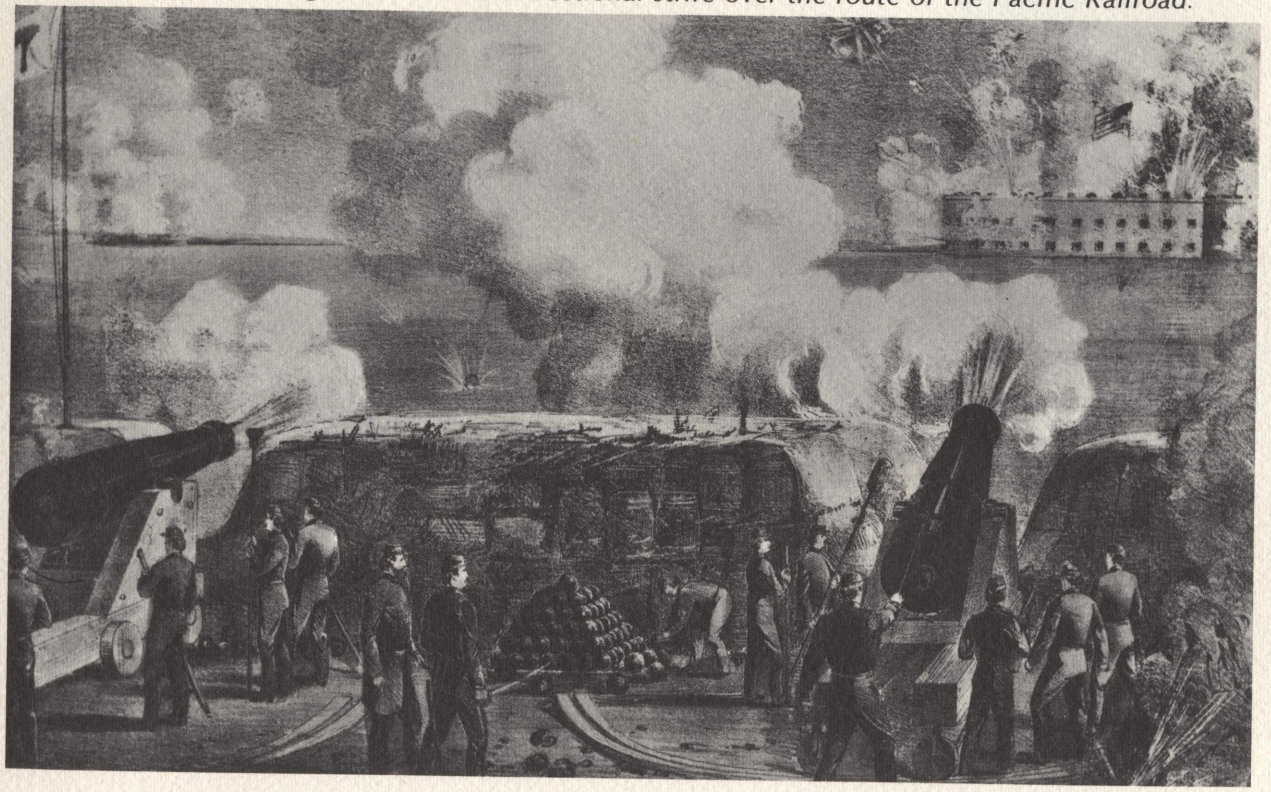
The way west was a dusty one for countless thousands in the 40's and 50's. Lured on by the promise of rich farming lands in Oregon or quick gold in California, pioneers made the trip the hard way—one foot in front of the other. Ten miles a day, on good days fifteen. Six months from the Missouri River to California's shore.

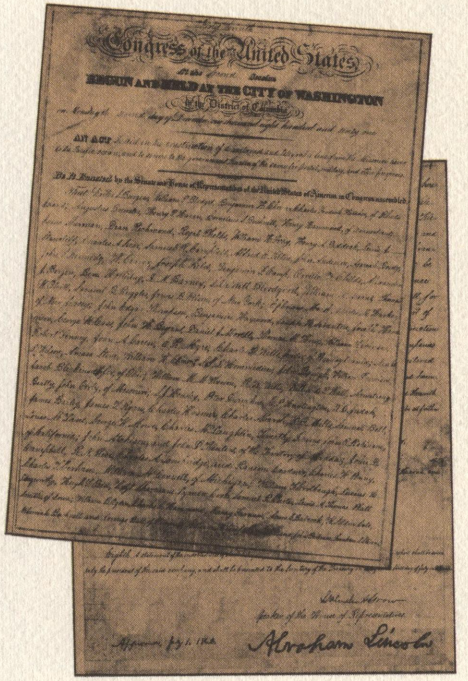
Their letters back home finally laid to rest the myth of the "Great American Desert." Many were tempted to settle along the way. Their eyes told them the land was good, but supplies would have to come in the same way they had come—by wagon. Their crops could only move out the same way. All agreed that what was needed was a railroad.

But there agreement stopped. Northern interests wanted a northern route for the great national enterprise. Southern interests championed their section. Deadlock.

It required the beginning of the Civil War in 1861 to settle the issue. Southern Congressmen took their opposition with them when the guns bombarding Fort Sumter called them home. July, 1862, Congress created the Union Pacific Railroad.

Firing on Fort Sumter signaled the end to sectional strife over the route of the Pacific Railroad.





Abraham Lincoln signed the act creating the Pacific Railroad, July, 1862.

Typical of the hand tools used to build the continent-spanning railroad is this 100-year old shovel.

Shovels, spike mauls, rifles & sweat

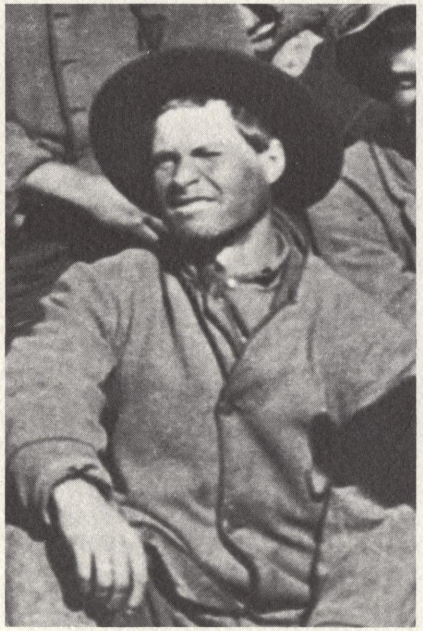
Ten thousand men on the raw edge of civilization—these were the construction crews that began building the Union Pacific in 1865. The jumping off place was the muddy river bottom town of Omaha in Nebraska Territory. No one knew where the end might be.

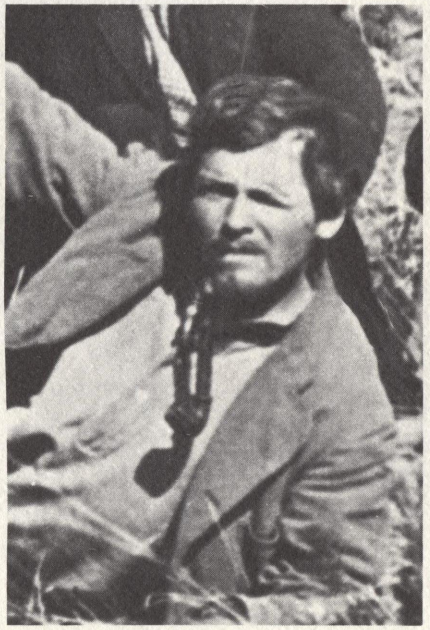
First came the surveyors selecting the route. Behind them the graders, cutting down the hills and filling in the valleys, blasting tunnels and stringing up bridges. The work was done by hand—shovel and pick, good black powder and mule carts to haul the debris away.

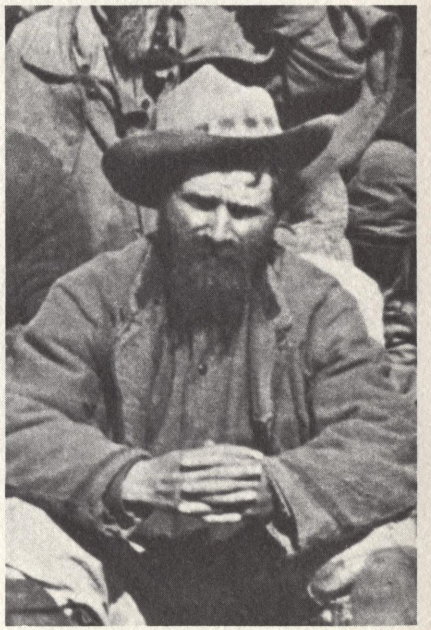
And behind the graders, inching forward into the unknown, came the tracklayers, laying down their twin bands of iron. Rough hewn ties, spikes and iron rails all had to be brought in by wagon or steamer to Omaha for no railroad from the East reached that town until 1867.

The men were a rough looking lot—

No movie stars here, but the look of determination shows on these tracklayers' faces of 100 years ago.







many of them Irishmen newly immigrated, many Civil War veterans—all seeking their fortune in the West.

As the Union Pacific built west, another railroad, the Central Pacific began to build east from California. Somewhere the two would meet and join the nation.

This 1866 photograph shows Union Pacific tracklayers at work in Nebraska Territory.

Far ahead of the tracklayers worked the graders, here shown making a cut through solid rock in Wyoming.

A spring sun in 1867 smiles as the Columbia River Steamer, "T. J. Potter," transfers its passengers and cargo to the train. The challenge of rail transportation is a growing reality.

Plains Indians, desperate for food and hides before the long cold winter sets in have stampeded a herd of buffalo onto the tracks just as an emigrant train rounds the bend. A settler stands ready to defend his sod house.

End of track

One lone street marks the typical end-of-track town of Promontory, Utah, in 1869.

"Soldiers, herdsmen, teamsters, women, railroad men are dancing, singing or gambling. There are men here who would murder a fellow creature for five dollars . . . mostly everyone seemed bent on debauchery and dissipation."

So said Henry Stanley, British journalist, when he visited the wild and woolly end-of-track town of Julesburg in 1867. As the construction crews pushed westward, canvas and board-front towns sprouted at whatever point happened to be the "End of Track." Gamblers and saloon-keepers were their mainstay and payday for the construction crews was the highpoint of the week.

Construction workers and their money were soon parted as gamblers set up their games even in the middle of the street.

THE FRONTIER INDEX

VOL. I. JULESBURG, FRIDAY, JULY 26, 1867.

Great Western OUTFITTING HOUSE, JONES & GREY

SHORTEST AND QUICKEST ROUTE BETWEEN THE Mountains and the East Union Pacific Rail Road,

1ST NATIONAL BANK

J. A. WARE & CO., BANKERS,

J. A. BUTPHEN, TOBACCO, CIGARS,

STABLES,

Furey & Harmon,

M. HELLMAN & CO.,

CLOTHING

St. Charles Hotel,

Hamilton House,

Stephens & Wilcox,

DRY GOODS,

L. MAY, WHOLESALE CLOTHING,

Dewey, Tremble & Co.

FURNITURE & BEDDING,

THE FRONTIER INDEX

HOWEL & KNOX.

Harness Making.

M. S. HALL,

GROCERIES,

AUCTION & COMMISSION

Liddel, Robertson & Brown.

OUTFITTING EMPORIUM.

Julesburg,

Corn, Oats, Bacon, Flour,

Beans, Coffee, Sugar, Rice,

Tobacco, Cigars, Liquors,

Union CLOTHING HALL,

Outfitting

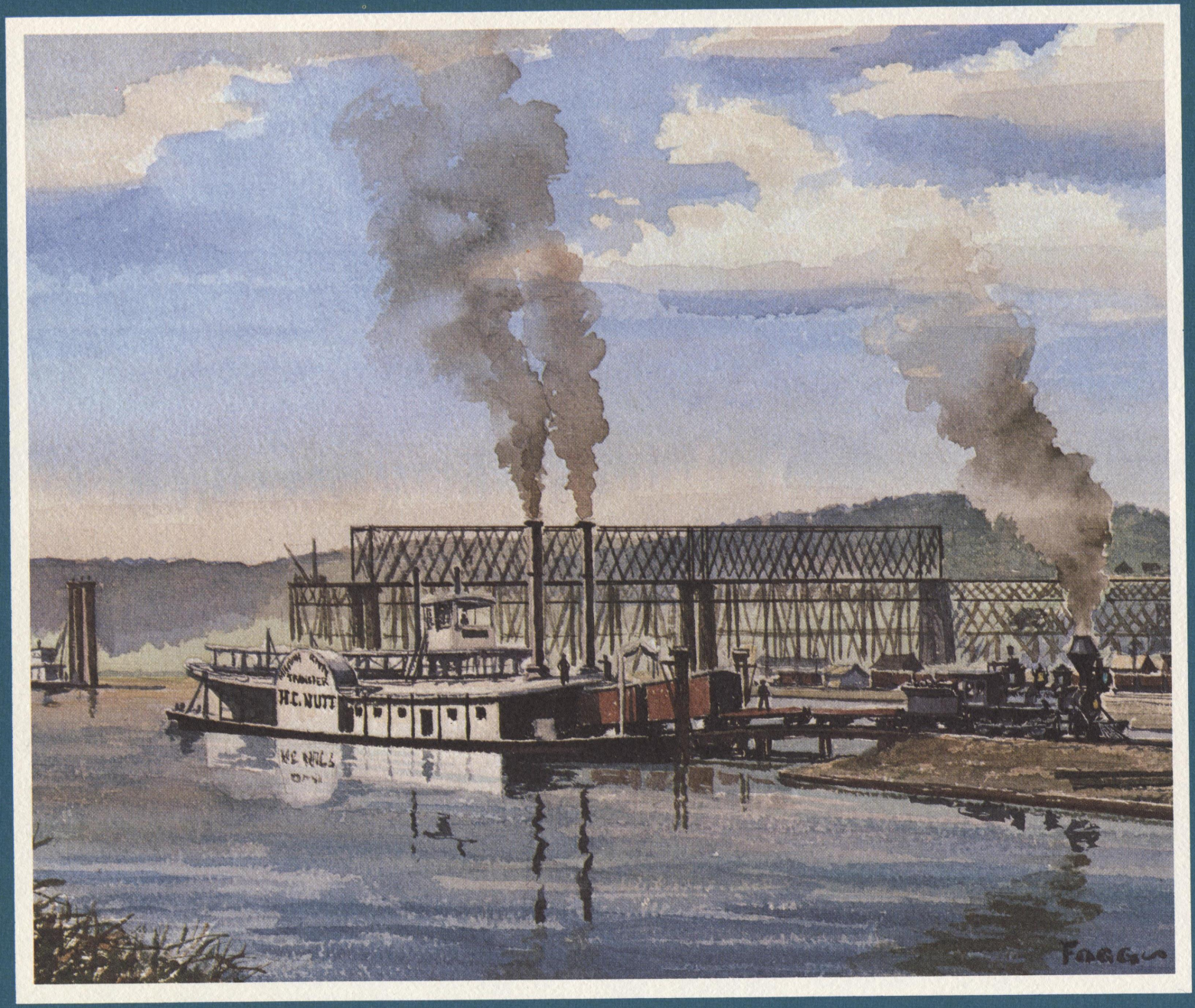
STAR BAKERY,

Julesburg, Colorado,
Friday July 26, 1867.
This is a reproduction of the front page of "THE FRONTIER INDEX", published by L. R. Freeman and H. V. Freeman. The latest news to the then young community.

Legh Freeman published a newspaper on wheels to keep the small army of workers well-informed. Called the Frontier Index it stood for a hardy brand of pioneer journalism. The issue shown here was printed on brown wrapping paper for lack of anything better.

Tough boss of the construction crews, Jack Casement prided himself on the discipline of his forces. A General in the Civil War, he organized his men with military precision, kept a completely stocked construction train "At the Front"—end of track. Angered at the gamblers and hangers on he repeatedly drove them out. After a particularly violent exchange he explained to a visitor what had happened to the gamblers by pointing to the local cemetery and saying tersely, "They all died with their boots on."

Tough Jack Casement drove the construction crews to complete the railroad—used fully equipped construction trains that moved forward with the track.



The wide Missouri being bridged in 1870, linking Council Bluffs and the East to Omaha and the West, spelling the doom of the sturdy but slow train ferry, "H. C. Nutt."

City planning—19th century style

North Platte, Lexington, Julesburg, Cheyenne, Laramie, Rock Springs, Evanston, these are a few of the towns that owe their founding to the coming of the railroad.

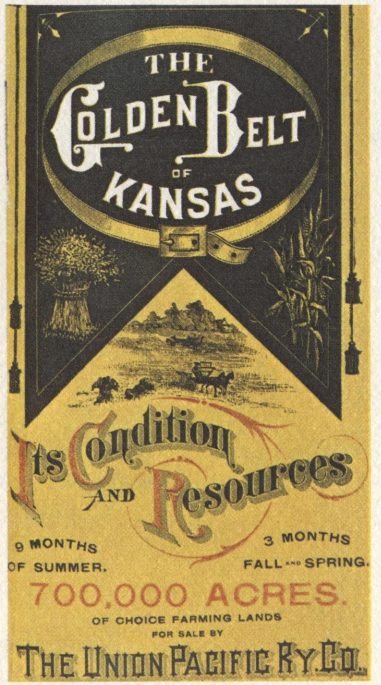
They all grew from end-of-track towns; starting off with a bang, dwindling almost to ghost towns when the construction crews moved on and then gradually building from a solid foundation as railroad operations increased and permanent settlers moved in.

Union Pacific planners worked hard to germinate towns along the line, laying out streets, encouraging settlers.

This one didn't make it. Bear River City, in the wilds of western Wyoming disappeared as soon as the track gangs did.

This one made it. City pride is evident in this artist's conception of the flourishing railroad town of Cheyenne, Wyo.

Union Pacific actively encouraged town building with ads like the one below.



The race to Promontory

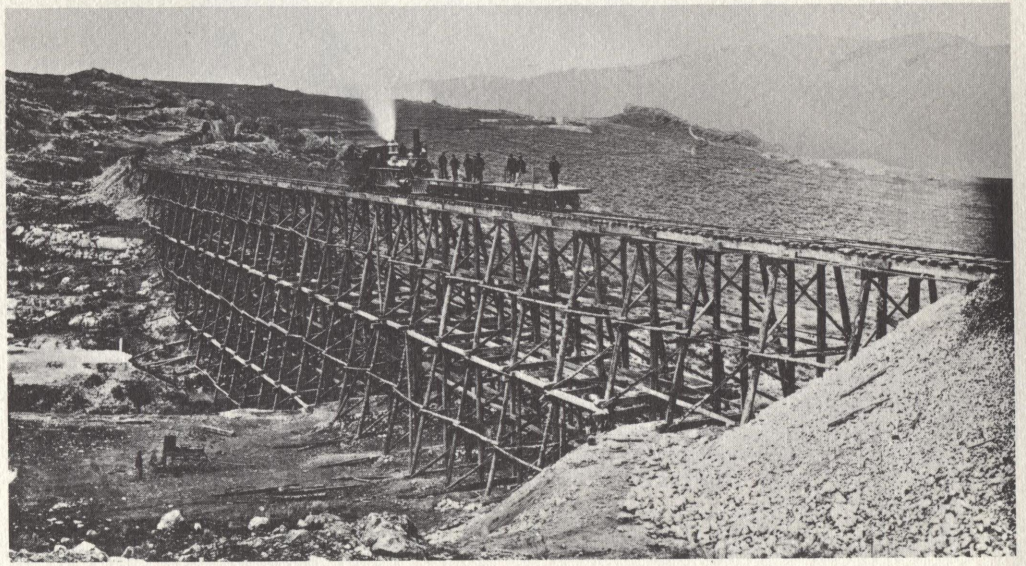
Union Pacific building from the East. Central Pacific building from the West. Where would the two meet? Congress had left the issue in doubt.

To the builders this meant just one thing: Lay as much iron as possible. Capture the territory before the other fellow gets it.

Union Pacific's Jack Casement drove his Irishmen faster and faster. No stopping during the winter of 1868-69. Down through the snow-covered canyons of the Wasatch Mountains. Into the Great Salt Lake basin.

Casement flung his grading crews far ahead of the tracklayers. So did the Central Pacific. Result: with no set meeting point the two grading crews crossed each other's paths —worked side by side for more than a hundred miles.

Hacking a cut out of solid rock UP graders had only picks and shovels, black powder and two-wheeled carts to work with.

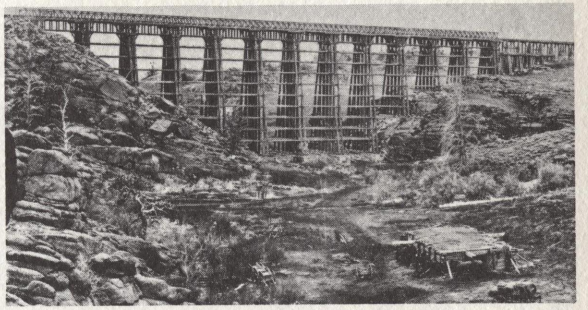


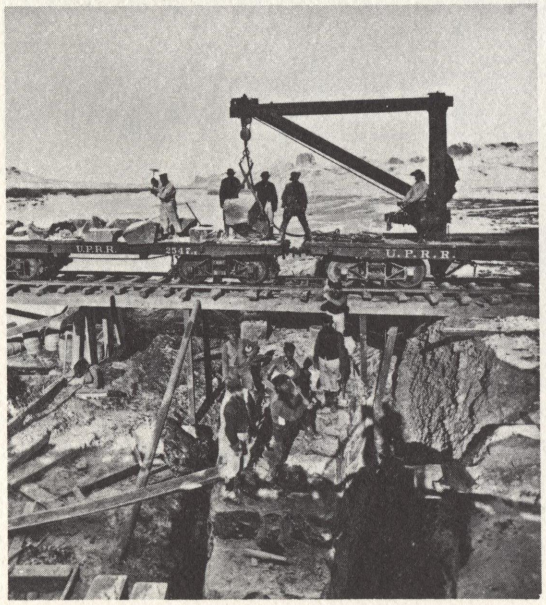
With time too short for tediously filled-in roadbeds Union Pacific engineers threw up this precarious trestle just miles short of Promontory.

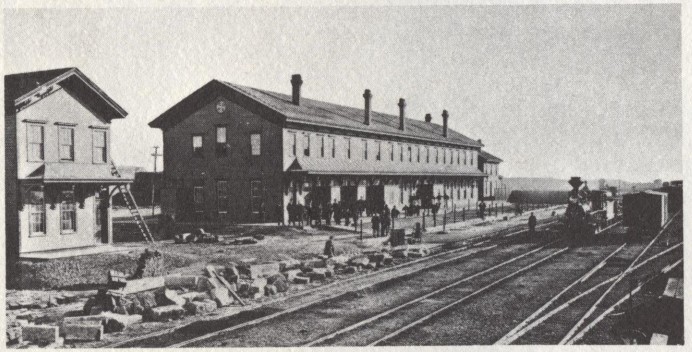
The starkness of this scene, painted by artist Howard Fogg, reflects the wilderness the rails had spanned. Before the ceremony a telegraph key had been hooked up to signal the exact moment when the last spike was driven home. Throughout the nation crowds waited to hear the news. At the scene a small army band played bravely. A special solid gold spike had been donated as a last minute thought. Speeches were made and a prayer offered. Finally, at 12:47 p.m. the last spike was driven home. The telegraph clicked, "Done!" The nation rejoiced.

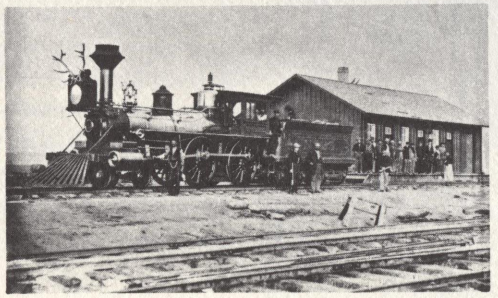
The Union Pacific—"Captured in Glass"

Shown here are part of a rare collection of 100 year-old photographs remarkable for their clarity and details. A. J. Russell's glass plate negatives are among the few originals still surviving and are preserved at the American Geographical Society.









For Sale: 12,000,000 acres

Even before the golden spike was driven, Union Pacific's managers realized they had a serious problem. The land their infant railroad crossed was almost unpopulated. With no people to serve, where would their business come from?

In September of 1868 the Union Pacific land department was created. Their job: To encourage settlement of the West. First step: Start selling the 12,000,000 acres granted Union Pacific by Congress to make the building of the road financially attractive to investors.

Union Pacific's land department launched a mammoth campaign. Colorful posters like the one on the covers and others were printed by the millions. Maps showing the area for sale rolled off the presses. Educational booklets and even a newspaper carried the theme of settlement in the West.

Agents were hired and sent throughout the eastern states and to Europe to encourage settlers.

It wasn't long before they came. Whole trainloads of immigrants travelled in rustic cars. Sometimes alone, sometimes in colonies numbering into the hundreds they came to build new lives, new farms and new communities along the Union Pacific tracks.

The link

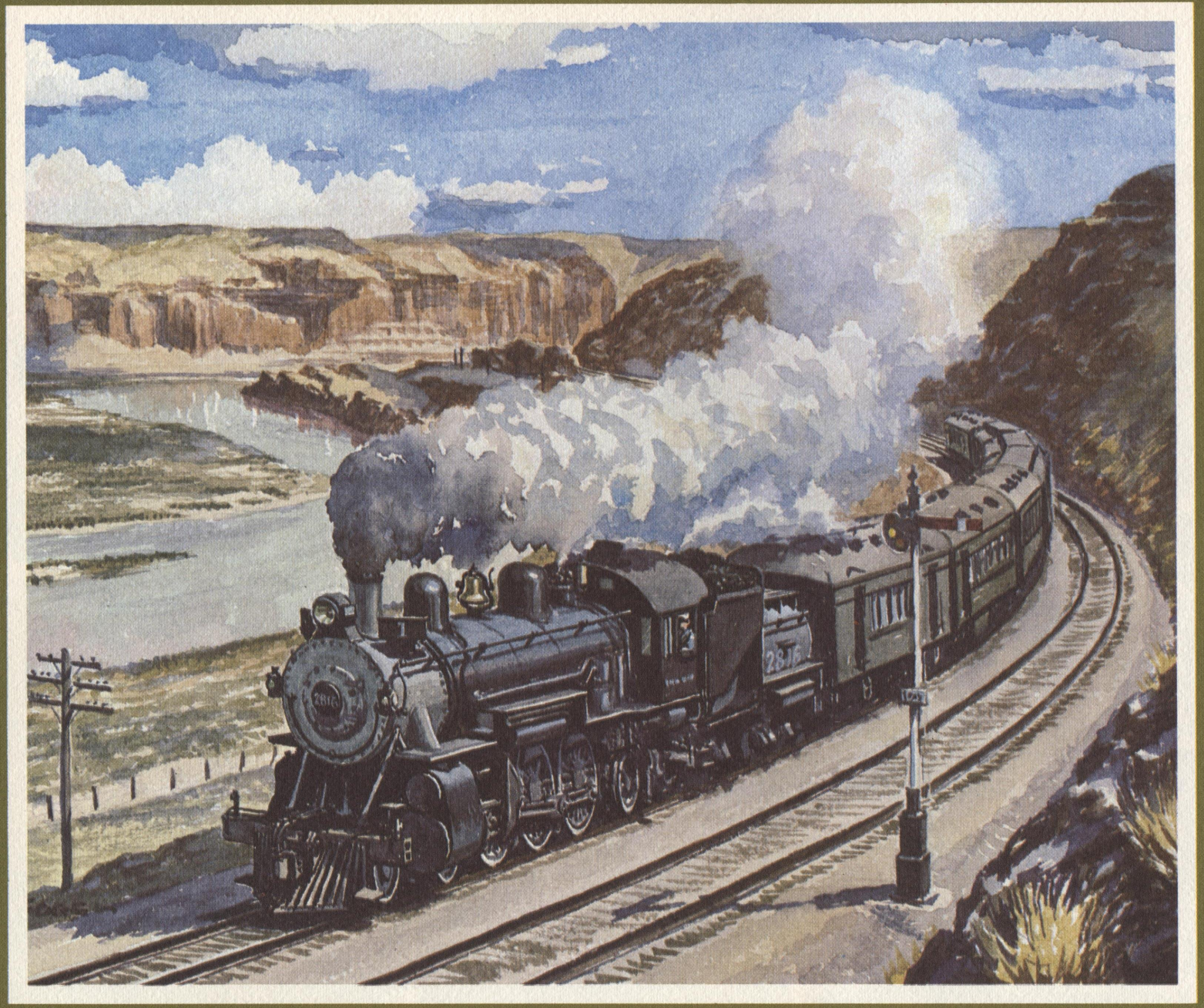
For many of the settlers on the prairie the only link with civilization was a roving column of smoke on the horizon and a lonesome whistle.

Still unborn were more modern methods of communication—highway networks, television and radio, the telephone. Then only the shining rails brought news and the necessities of life—calico and gingham, rock salt and coffee beans, buttons and plowshares.

The same rails provided a way for the settlers to get the fruits of his labor out to the consumer—beef for the hungry city dwellers of the East, corn, flour, wool and lamb.

The railroad depot was the center of community life, the arrival of the 5 o'clock local one of the high points in a small boy's life. The telegraph key in the agent's office connected the community to the outside world.

Union Pacific's Boonville, Ore. depot in the 1880's—young and old await the arrival of the next train. Note Victorian architecture.



The Overland Limited! A name that recalls to memory the great era of transcontinental trains. Here, in 1917, the Overland with its sleepers, diner, buffet and open observation car, speeds westward along Wyoming's Green River.

"All Aboard!"

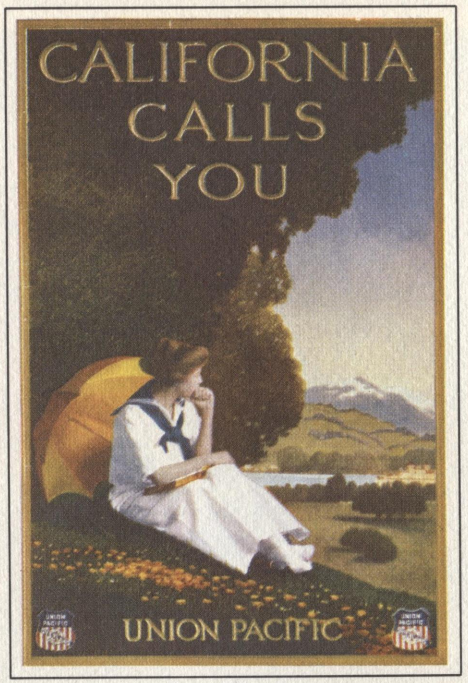
Horses and trains and riverboats. Those were the only choices for getting from here to there for half a century after the driving of the golden spike. And there were few riverboats, indeed, on the Great Plains.

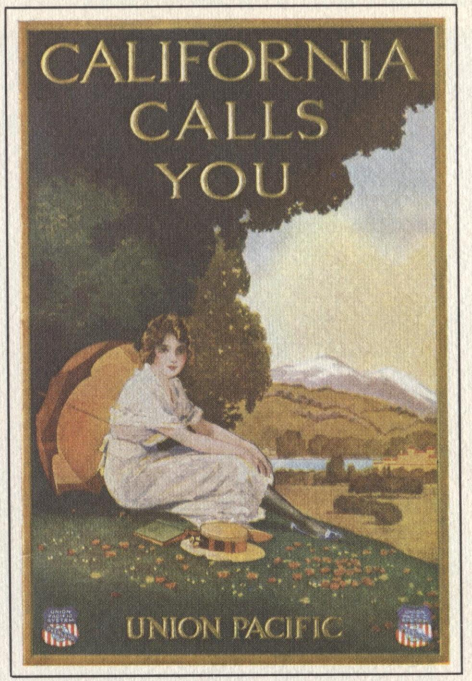
For long distance travel (over 20 miles) the only logical method was by train. It was the grand era of passenger train travel. And what an era it was! The Overland Limited, the Gold Coast Limited, the Columbine—fast and luxurious travel for a nation becoming aware of the pleasures of moving about. See the American West, California beckons, and in the 1920's record numbers of passengers rode Union Pacific Rails.

The trains they rode were the last word in luxury. Complete with barber shops and showers and up-to-the-minute stock market reports in the men's club room.

Soon the automobile began to lure travelers away from the rails. Fighting back Union Pacific introduced the world's first streamliner in 1934—the City of Salina. Top speed: 110 miles per hour. The railroad followed up with fast, low cost, coach service – the famed Challenger trains.

But the automobile was here to stay.





This demure lass first appeared on a Union Pacific tourist pamphlet in 1911. Right: Is it the same girl? In 1922, with feminine emancipation just around the corner she now stares brazenly at the reader, shows her ankle.

City of Salina's introduction in 1934 electrified the world of transportation, gave birth to a new generation of streamliners.

When the chips were down

Twice in the twentieth century global war critically tested the nation's economy—and in particular the resources of the nation's railroads. Twice Union Pacific rose to the challenge, delivered millions of tons of war materials and whole armies of troops.

World War I found many railroads unable to meet the challenge as freight movements skyrocketed to "Make the world safe for democracy." Antiquated yards and tracks became clogged. Though Union Pacific's recently modernized system was equal to the challenge, other railroads bogged down. In crisis, President Woodrow Wilson took control of all railroads for the duration of the war. Throughout, Union Pacific provided one dependable route for fast rail movement.

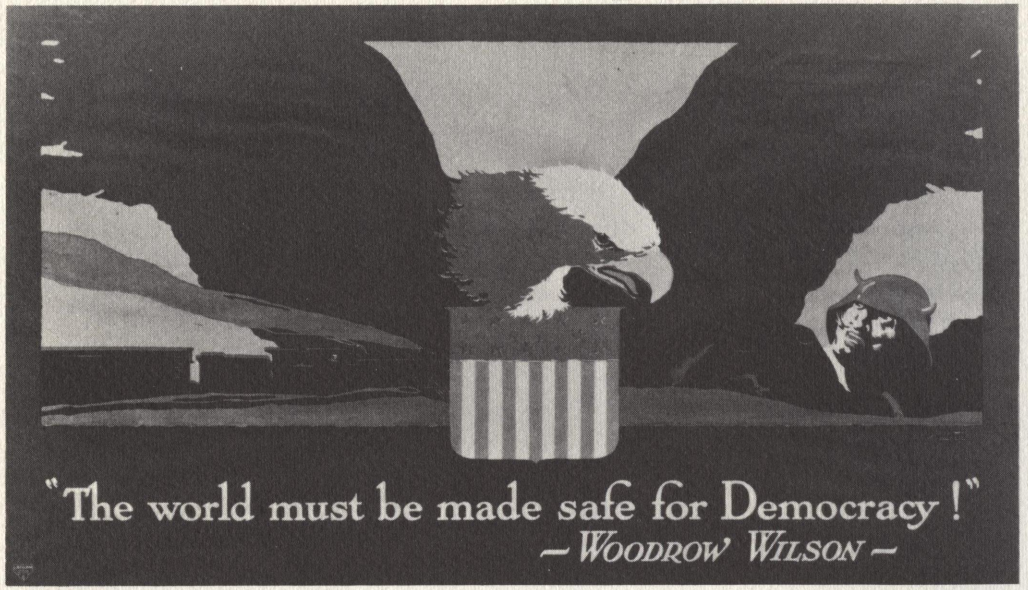
The crisis threatened to recur in 1941 when the nation was plunged into the even more desperate struggle of World War II. Freight tonnage increases were staggering. On one district alone Union Pacific crews worked round the clock to deliver an increase in gross freight tonnage that amounted to 149,402,929 tons for only three months.

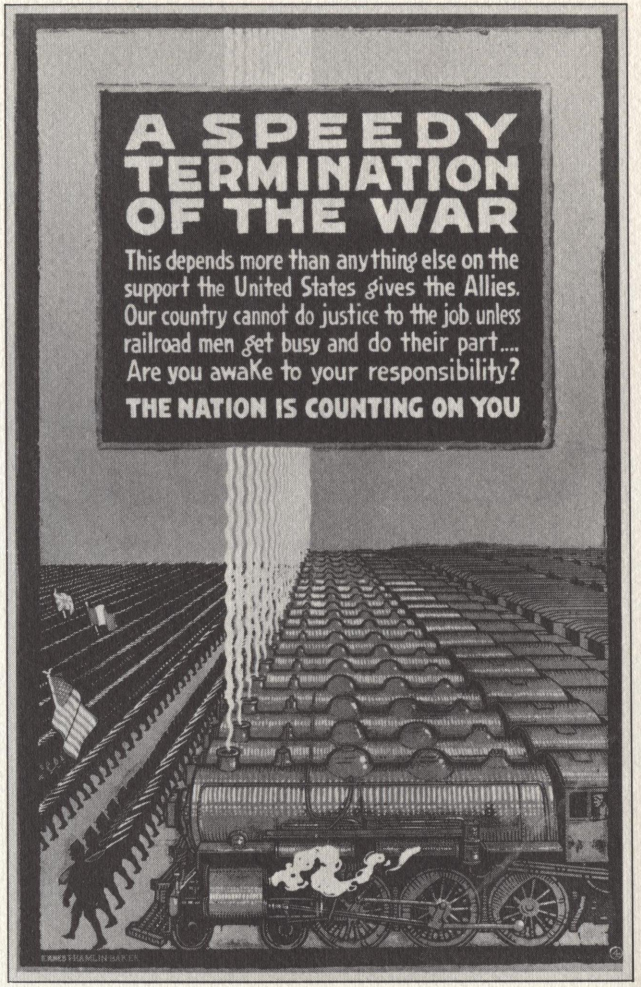
Freight wasn't the only thing handled by the railroad during the war years. Troop trains by the thousands threaded their way east and west over Union Pacific rails.

More than six million GI's stopped for a quick cup of coffee at North Platte, Nebraska's famed railroad canteen during World War II.

American Railroads went to World War II. Union Pacific, with its strategic middle route, developed an almost computer schedule for high speed troop trains and military equipment.

"The World Must Be Made Safe For Democracy!" This was the cry for World War I.





Colorful poster such as these typify the response of the railroads to answer their countrys needs and to encourage railroad workers.

After being plunged into war again on Dec. 7, 1941, Union Pacific kept 'em rolling!

The "Big Boy" was King of the Hill—any hill. Old number 4004, one of twenty five of the World's largest steam locomotives, heads west over famed Sherman Hill in 1953. Glistening with polish, the 4004 is now on display in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

The unbelievable, breath taking beauty of a desert sunrise seen from the dome cars of the "City of Los Angeles"—worth a whole page in your memory picture book.

The railroad grows

The thin band of iron stretching from Omaha to Promontory in 1869 promised only to drive the young railroad into bankruptcy at an early date. To prosper the rails must serve more than just the populations at either end and the few scattered communities along the way.

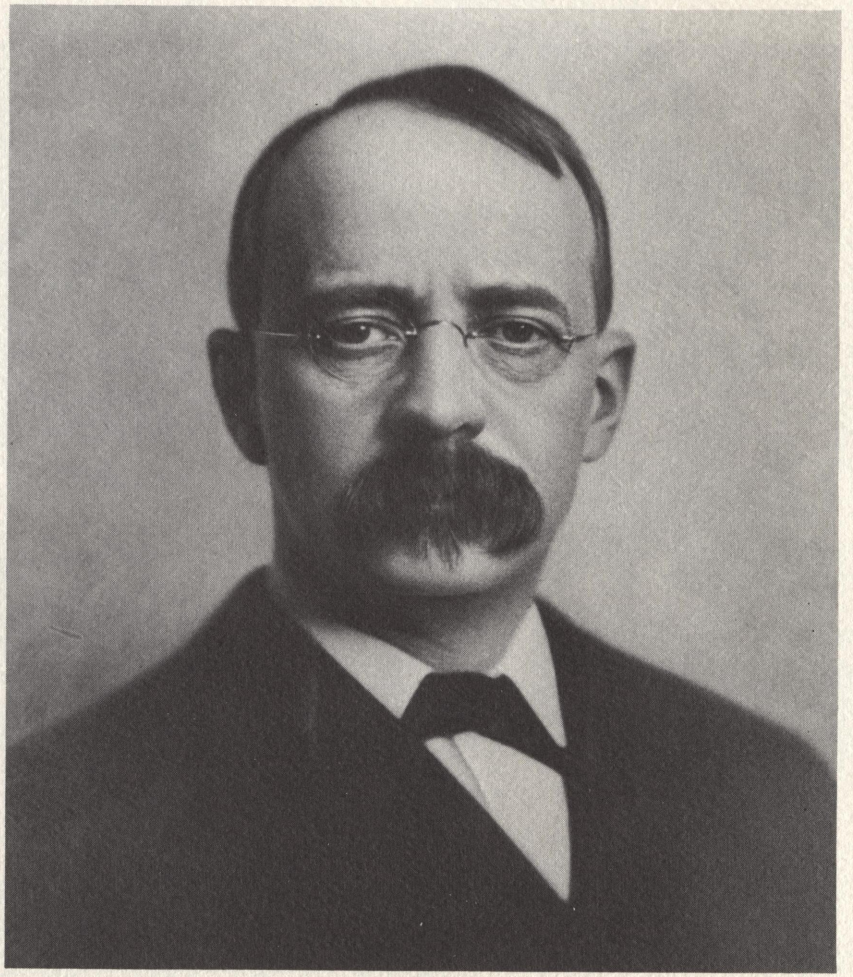
What was needed, obviously, was more rails to serve more people in more areas. To do this Union Pacific's manager early embarked on a course of expansion, adding branch lines at many places and projecting new lines into the further west.

In 1880 the Kansas Pacific and Denver Pacific railroads were brought into the system, adding Kansas City and Denver. Branch lines were pushed out into Nebraska.

At the western end of the railroad the pacific northwest beckoned. Gradually lines were extended up into Idaho, across Oregon to link Portland and later Seattle to the Union Pacific. Gold and other minerals in Montana led to a northern line to Butte.

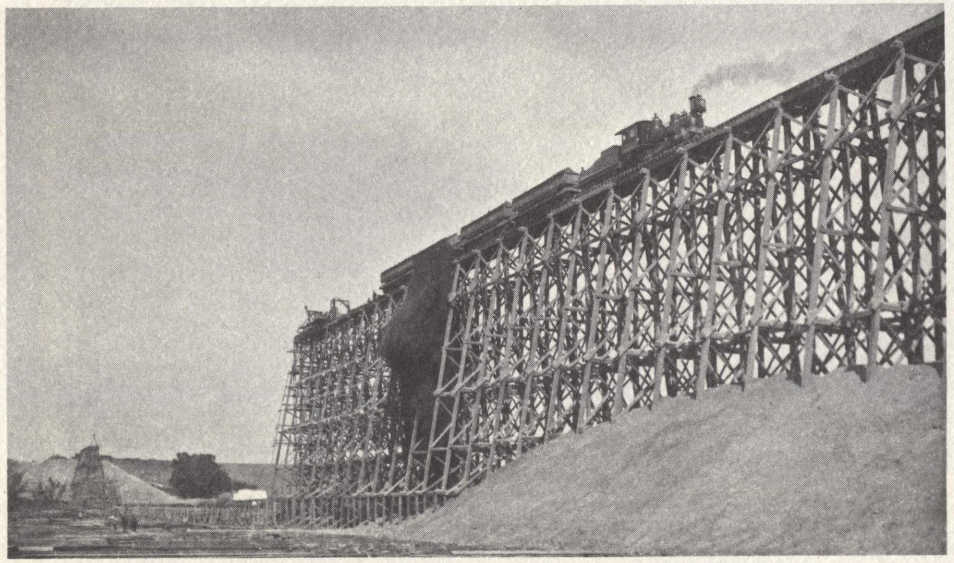
Southwest of Salt Lake City the going was slower. As Mormon settlements in middle and southern Utah made the need for a railroad the iron rails reached out, and finally connected with Los Angeles in 1905. Along the way the crews paused to found a town at a deserted ranch site in southern Nevada. The name of the town: Las Vegas.

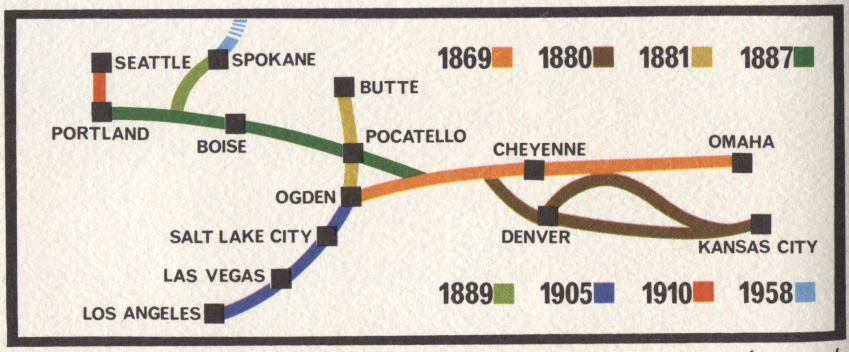
Financier Edward H. Harriman took control of Union Pacific shortly before the turn of the century and immediately began to invest heavily in rebuilding the existing lines and adding more branch lines. Steep grades were reduced, tunnels bored, bridges strengthened, difficult curves in the old track straightened out. By the beginning of World War I, Union Pacific had been virtually rebuilt into one of the nation's finest railroads.



Edward H. Harriman,
the man personally responsible for rebuilding much of Union Pacific at the turn of the century.

Engine 63 was the center of attention on newly completed line at La Grande, Ore.





Map shows the progressive stages of growth of Union Pacific from a single line of track from Omaha to the Great Salt Lake. Today the road totals nearly 10,000 miles

Mammoth earth fill just west of Omaha was one of many improvements made by Edward H. Harriman as he rebuilt Union Pacific during the first decade of the 20th century.

A 24-hour snow-blow rotary plow somewhere in the winter wonderland of the Pacific Northwest clears the mainline for passengers and freight for fast, safe arrival and delivery.

Big Power, Big Train, Big Country! Today's modern rail equipment. Keeps mile-a-minute freight on the move. Part of everything you eat, wear or use was most likely part of a rail shipment.

Today and tomorrow

The Irishmen who fought off Indians to lay the first iron rails to the Pacific 100 years ago would find it hard to recognize today's Union Pacific. Practically none of their work remains. The rails and ties have been replaced many times over. The roadbed has been moved, straightened, rebuilt and upgraded. Their picturesque steam engines have been replaced by more modern motive power.

One thing that hasn't changed is the pioneering spirit that drove the rails west 100 years ago. Today the railroad pioneers in different directions, but pioneers just the same. Giant new diesel locomotives, fittingly named Centennial Locomotives, generate 6,600 horsepower, 20 per cent more than any locomotives of any other railroad in the world.

The telegraph operator was a quaint and familiar figure in yesterday's railroad. Today he has been replaced by microwave radio communications that beam messages from mountaintop to mountaintop throughout Union Pacific's west.

Data processing and computerized operations play a large part in the running of today's Union Pacific —promise to play an even larger part tomorrow.

A recently opened automatic freight switching and sorting facility in North Platte, Neb., Bailey Yard, is among the world's most modern.

Today the glamour of railroading is not to be found in Victorian elegance of Pullman Palace sleeping cars so much as in high speed piggyback and containerized freight service.

The pioneering spirit of yesterday's first transcontinental railroad today appears in a modern transportation-based growth company. Today's Union Pacific is also vitally interested in industrial development in the many communities it serves and natural resource exploration and development throughout the west.

The ultimate in computerized transportation techniques.

Union Pacific operational standards are so demanding that a modern mechanized track gang had to be invented. Known as "Circus Trains" they are another example of the Automated Rail Way.

A solid train of containers, intercontinental shipments and piggyback truck trailers helping to keep highways clear.

6,600 horse power locomotive—world's most powerful.

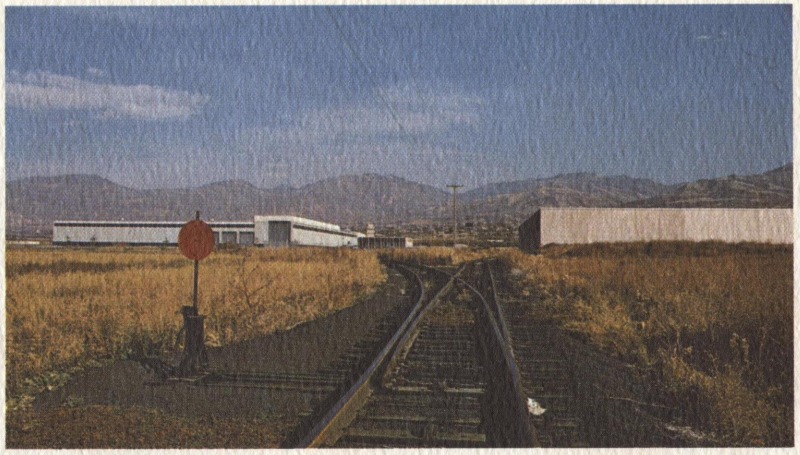
New $12 million
Bailey Yard classification center.

By land and by sea! Increasing use of containers has literally established Union Pacific as a world-wide carrier, with common point connections for all Atlantic and Gulf shipments and direct connections serving more Pacific Coast ports than any other railroad.

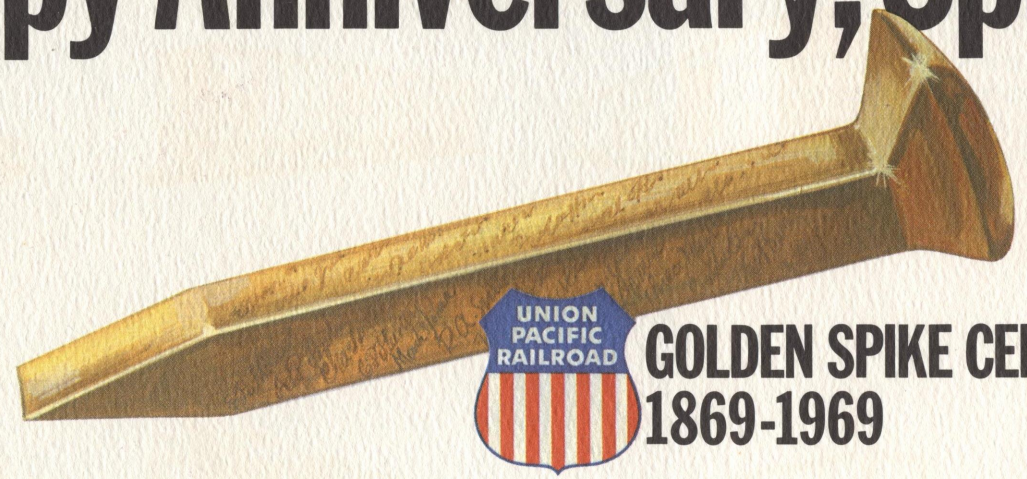
Private microwave network for instant communications.

Extracting and transporting nature's raw material for vital everyday products.

Developing planned-ahead plant sites for total transportation distribution.



Happy Anniversary, Spike!



GOLDEN SPIKE CENTENNIAL
1869-1969

100M 3/69

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GOLDEN SPIKE
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